

AGE AND SEX DISTRIBUTION IN 2004

Birthdays take on different meanings as people grow older. To a young person, a birthday might mean an opportunity to get a driver's license or to vote for the first time. To an older person, it might mean a retirement party. Health issues, including everything from childhood diseases to geriatric conditions, are associated with age. These and many other life experiences are somewhat different for the male population than for the female population. That is why the U.S. Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program produces age and sex data for the United States, states, and counties.

Men and Women

Within the total resident population in 2004 (293.7 million), women and girls outnumbered men and boys by 4.6 million—149.1 million, compared with 144.5 million. This difference was not spread evenly throughout the age groups, as illustrated in the age pyramid shown in Figure 1. Among those under 18, boys outnumbered girls in 2004. From about age 40

on, women were the majority. Among people in their nineties, the ratio of men to women was 37 to 100, reflecting the greater life expectancy of women than men.¹ The pyramid bulges in the middle, indicating the large cohort known as the Baby Boom Generation, who were aged 40 to 58 in 2004. Other irregularities in the pyramid frequently reflect years with relatively high or low birth rates.

Age Groups

Between Census Day (April 1, 2000) and July 1, 2004, the population of most 5-year age groups grew. Five age groups experienced declines, as illustrated in Figure 2.

The largest decline (7.3 percent) was among the population aged 35 to 39, the age group that the Baby Boom Generation was leaving. The fastest-growing population under 85 was the population aged 55 to 59. This age group grew about 22 percent as the oldest Baby Boomers replaced the smaller cohort of people who were born before them.

While the total population increased 4.3 percent between 2000 and 2004, the population aged 65 and older increased 3.7 percent. A "birth dearth" during the late 1920s and early 1930s was largely responsible for the slow growth of this group. The population aged 70 to 74 shrank 4.0 percent, reflecting the entry into this age group of the small birth cohorts of the early 1930s. Other 5-year age groups within this older age group saw increases. The population aged 85 and older grew by 15 percent.

On July 1, 2004, the median age of the population was 36.0 years—older than the highest median age ever recorded in a census (35.3 in Census 2000).

Words That Count

An **age pyramid** is a horizontal bar graph, usually showing the size of the male population on the left and the female population on the right, with age groupings beginning with the youngest populations on the bottom and ending with the oldest ones at the top, as shown in Figure 1.

Median age is the age at which half the population is older and half is younger.

A **birth cohort** is a group of people born during the same time period.

The **Baby Boom Generation** is the large cohort of people born from 1946 to 1964.

¹ The number of males per 100 females is called the sex ratio. To find out more about sex ratios, see the chapters on men and women and on the older population.

Figure 1.
Population by Single Year of Age and Sex: 2004

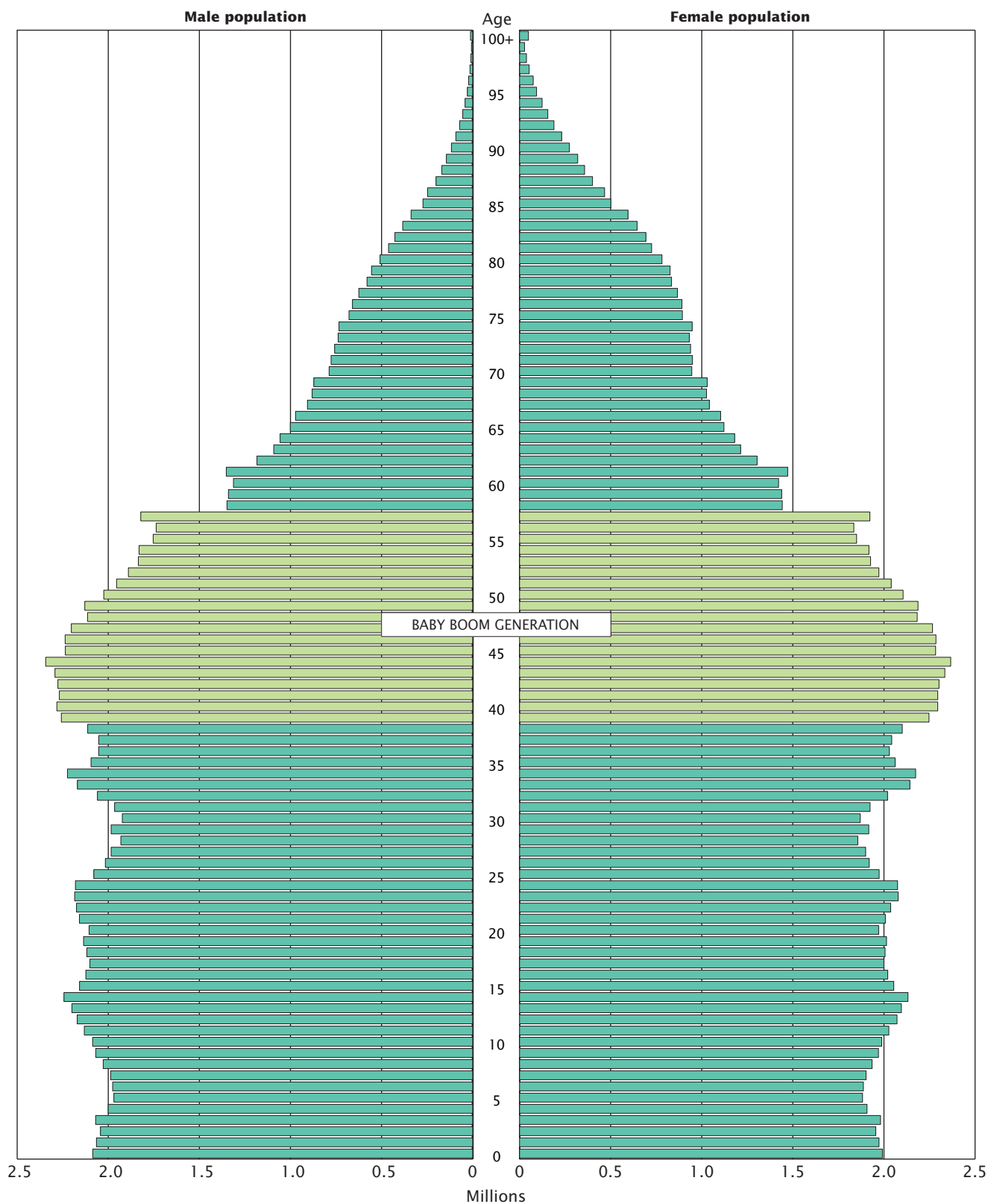
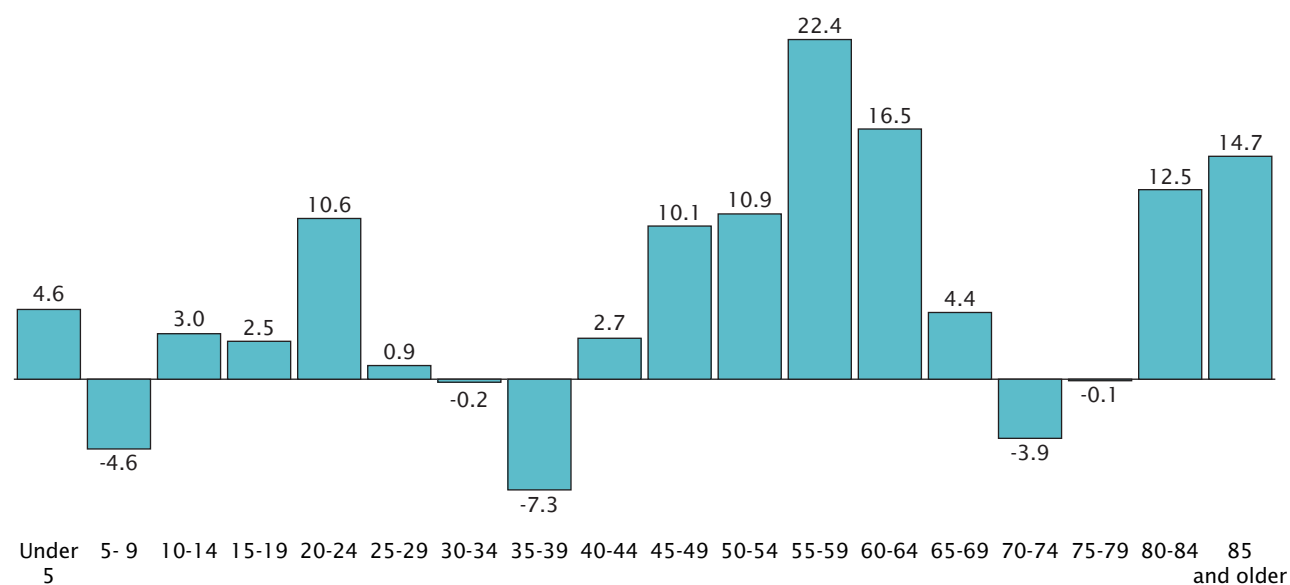
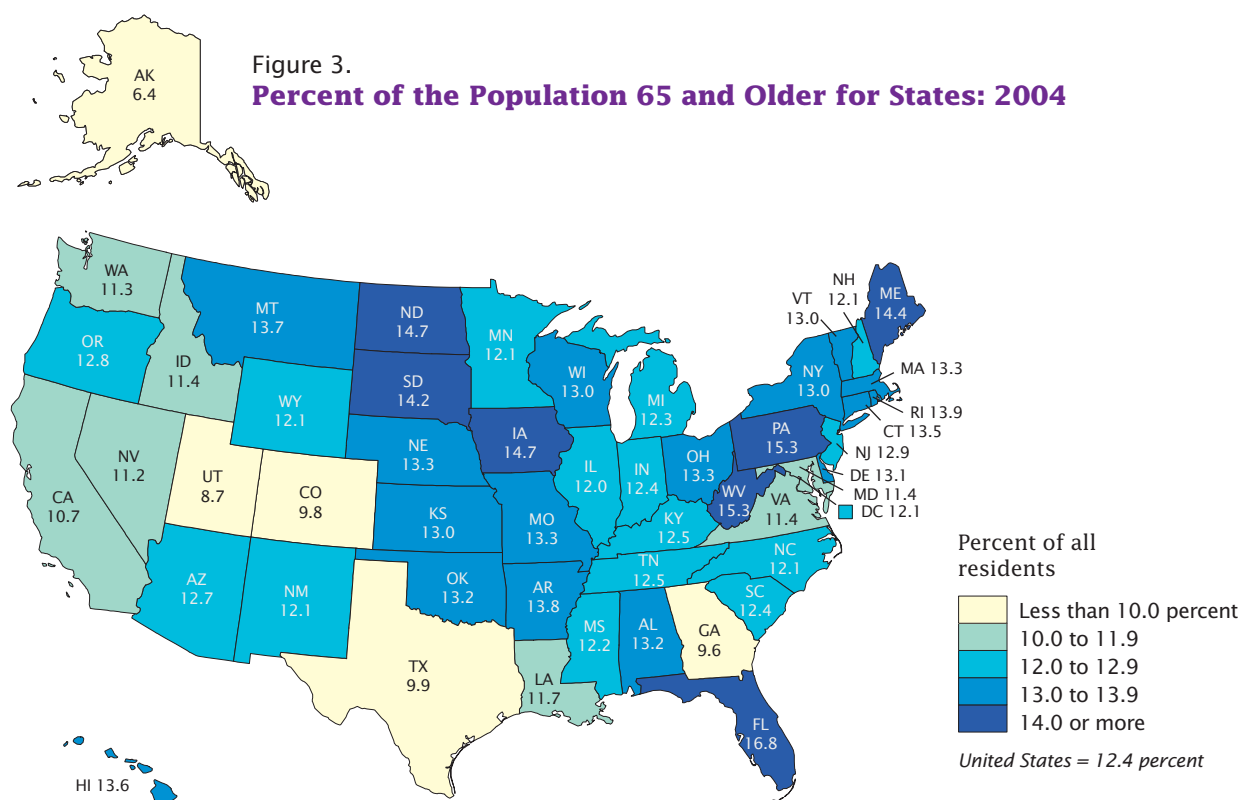


Figure 2.
Percent Change in Population by Age: 2000 to 2004



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, April 1, 2000, and July 1, 2004.

Figure 3.
Percent of the Population 65 and Older for States: 2004



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program, April 1, 2000, and July 1, 2004.

State Differences

The population aged 65 and older illustrates age differences by state. While 12 percent of U.S. residents were aged 65 and older in 2004, the proportions in individual states differed. Florida had the highest proportion in this age range, 17 percent, as shown in Figure 3. West Virginia and Pennsylvania followed, with proportions above 15 percent. Alaska anchored the other end of the scale, with 6 percent of its population in this age range. The proportion of the population that was age 65 and older was also below 10 percent in Utah, Georgia, Colorado, and Texas.

The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

For more detailed information, go to the Population Estimates Program Web site <www.census.gov/popest/estimates.php>.

Look for information on related topics on the Census Bureau's Web site <www.census.gov>.

Contact the Census Bureau's Customer Services Center at 301-763-INFO (4636) or e-mail <pop@census.gov>.